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Diving into the O.C.E.A.N. of Customer Motivations

In last month's Link & Learn we looked at some of the great ideas and research contained in Vanessa Van Edwards' outstanding book, *Captivate: The Science of Succeeding with People*. Dr. Van Edwards looks at the personalities of the people she meets as puzzles to be solved. She believes that if we can understand what motivates the behaviors of the people in our lives, we will be far more successful in enlisting their cooperation and support. She uses the example of Procter and Gamble executive, David Nicolosi, who turned around a struggling marketing department by working to listen to his team and getting to understand their personalities. He used these insights to show them how their personal goals aligned with the department's objectives. Dr. Van Edwards quotes David Nicolosi who said, "People come in a host of flavors, and understanding what flavor they are—and therefore what their hot buttons are—is necessary to lead and motivate them." Understanding other people's "hot buttons," is not only useful to us as managers and salespeople, but is invaluable in every aspect of our lives.

The O.C.E.A.N. Model

Vanessa Van Edwards uses a five factor model to help her understand human behavior. How can just five factors help one understand something as complex and diverse as the human psyche? Think of a combination lock on a safe. There is only room for a limited number of digits on the small black dial used to unlock it, but there are almost an infinite number of permutations of those few numbers. Each of us fall at different points on the scale used to measure each of the five factors used in the O.C.E.A.N. model. These gradations account for the infinite variations found in human behavior. While the O.C.E.A.N. model does not promise to provide a crystal clear window into the mind of everyone we encounter, learning and applying it to our meetings with others will certainly make our interactions with them go much smoother.

O.C.E.A.N. is, of course, an acronym. It stands for the five primary factors that affect human behavior. These are:

- **Openness**—this trait reflects our acceptance of new ideas. It also impacts how curious we are, our level of creativity and our appreciation of originality and variety.
- **Conscientiousness**—this deals with how one approaches their work. It measures self-discipline, attention to detail, organization and reliability.
- **Extroversion**—this is concerned with how we approach other people. Do interactions with others energize or drain a person? This trait also impacts one's optimism and talkativeness.
- **Agreeableness**—essentially this addresses if we "play well with others!" Is the person in question more cooperative or do they prefer to work alone? Do they "go along to get along," or do they take the "my way or the highway" approach to life.

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- **Neuroticism**—this is a measure of how much a person worries, of how they react to situations in life.

Each of us fall somewhere on a continuum ranked from low to high for each of these factors. Each of us has a different genetic make-up which is partially responsible for our behavior. Scientists refer to this as a “*biogenic source*” of behavior. To quote Lady Gaga (*A phrase I truly believed that I would never have occasion to use!*), “*we were born that way.*” For example: some people are naturally more optimistic than others from birth. Geneticists are just beginning to understand how much our biology affects our behavior, but the current consensus is that biogenic factors account for about 35% to 50% of our behaviors. “*Sociogenic sources*” seem to have a greater impact on how we see the world and our interactions with others. We are the product of our physical environment, of how we were raised and how everything we experience in our lives impacts our behavior. For example, identical twins theoretically share the same genome, but they will evolve unique personalities as their paths diverge throughout their lives.

To help her better understand the people she encounters in her business and personal life, Vanessa Van Edwards created a matrix or “cipher” using the O.C.E.A.N. model. This consists of a circle with the letters, O, C, E, A, and N, written around its perimeter. Next to these letters she places an arrow point up to indicate if the person ranks high in this factor, down to indicate a low ranking or just a dash if they rank somewhere between the two extremes. By comparing the other person’s matrix with her own, she can see areas of agreement or of potential conflict. This also helps her to understand how she needs to adjust her behavior to bring her in sync with the person she is working with.

Of course, to use this technique we must know where both parties involved fall on the scales for each of the five factors. In *Captivate*, Dr. Van Edwards, offers some questions to help the reader understand their own personality. For example: when considering your placement on the “Openness” scale ask yourself, “*Do I like to try new things? Eat at new restaurants etc.*” If the answer is yes, then you rank high on Openness. If you prefer to eat at the same restaurant because you’ve never had a bad experience there, then rate yourself low on this factor. Continue this process for each of the factors until you get a clear picture of where you fall in each of them. Dr. Van Edwards has a 42 question test on her website (www.ScienceofPeople.com/toolbox) that will help you determine exactly where you fall in each of the five factors.

When evaluating yourself in each of the factors you must be brutally honest with yourself. Consider how you feel in a variety of situations. Try to think about “what comes naturally,” rather than what you force yourself to do, because it is the “right” thing to do. Some years ago, one of my top sales call center reps surprised me by giving her two week notice. She was leaving to take a clerical

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position at another company, a job that paid significantly less than what she was earning. When I asked, “Why”, she told me that she, “always hated talking to strangers all day!” This surprised me because she never seemed hesitant to pick up the phone and cold call. In our discussion, I learned that even though she was naturally an introvert, she forced herself to act in an extroverted way because she was putting her son through school and needed the money. Her love for her son overrode her dislike of cold calling, so she forced herself to do it for years. I thought she was high on the extrovert scale, but our discussion showed me that she was driven by her conscientiousness, her desire to do the right thing for her son.

Of course you can’t ask each of your customers and prospects to take a personality test before talking to them. *(Though this is a good exercise to have your employees complete, comparing matrixes can be an interesting subject for a sales or staff meeting)* As in most sales situations, good observation skills and well thought out questions are your most powerful tools. Review the prospects website and literature, a business person who offers the latest technology or techniques is likely to rank high on openness. Talk to their employees, this is a quick way to find out where a prospect falls on the agreeableness scale and can offer some clues as to their neuroticism. Look at their place of business, a neat, well organized operation is a sign of a conscientious person; disorganization indicates someone who ranks low in this area. Frame questions to gain insight into their personality. The answer to a relationship building question like, “*Have you tried that new Sushi place down the street yet?*” can tell you volumes about a prospect. A prospect who says, “*Yes, I try to check out all the new restaurants just to see what they offer*”, signals high openness while a response like, “*That stuffs not for me, I’m a meat and potatoes guy myself*”, indicates a more closed mindset. Your goal is to gain a better understanding of the prospect’s personality. This information will enable you to present your products and ideas in a way that aligns with the customer’s perception, making it easier for them to understand and accept your recommendation.

There are two good reasons why salespeople don’t have to worry about being replaced by robots: first, no two sales calls are ever the same and second, customers almost never act logically. Robots are confounded by the unpredictability of the sales process. In our world there is no “one size fits all” solution for presenting our products. Using the O.C.E.A.N. model allows salespeople to tailor their presentation to fit their prospects’ personality. For example, when presenting to a person who ranks high on the openness scale it is safe to describe your idea as, “*new and innovative.*” This approach would scare away a prospect who ranks low in this area. It would be better to show them that your product is, “*much like what worked for you in the past, but less expensive.*” For a high conscientious person, it is important to present your products in an ordered and organized fashion. When dealing with a high

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ranking extrovert you can dive right into your presentation, with someone who leans toward introversion, it pays to spend more time building a relationship to make the person more comfortable with you before pitching them.

A person who ranks low on agreeableness will need to see proof, statistics, audit information etc., of the value your product offers before they decide to buy. People high on the neuroticism scale will need reassurance that there is nothing to worry about before they will buy anything.

The O.C.E.A.N. model is just one more tool that salespeople can use to convince their customers to advertise. Most people are aware of the line from Sun Tzu's, *The Art of War*, which reads, "The general who knows himself will win 50% of the time, the general who knows the enemy will win 50% of the time, but the general who knows both himself and the enemy will not be defeated in a thousand battles." Though I can't promise that you will win your next thousand sales, I can promise you that using the O.C.E.A.N. model will have a positive impact on your sales. Though none of us can truly understand what goes on inside another person's mind, simply making the attempt is sure to make us more empathetic and help us to see things from the other person's point of view. Just this awareness, will help us to find common ground with our customers, employees and co-workers.

As I said last month, I highly recommend Vanessa Van Edwards' *Captivate*. For more on the O.C.E.A.N. model, you can view Dr. Brian R. Little's TED Talk (www.TED.com) or read his book *Who Are You, Really, The Surprising Puzzle of Personality*. Human beings are undoubtedly the most interesting species on earth and perhaps the universe. This diversity is what keeps life interesting. It is also why selling can be one of the most enjoyable ways to earn a living. Take a dive into the O.C.E.A.N. model of personality; it is sure to make the game of unravelling the puzzle of human personalities even more interesting.

This article was written by Jim Busch.

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